



# A TALE OF TWO DEPUTIES

Reviewing the Political Terrain of the 2024 Ondo Governorship Election

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## Introduction

From the moment the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced the dates for the two governorship elections scheduled for 2024 (in Edo and Ondo states), analysts, politicians and the media have made comparisons between the likely results in the two states. Both states headed into the primary seasons with deputy governors seeking to succeed to the top job, with different outcomes.

In Edo State, Philip Shaibu was unable to win the primary of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). He was eventually impeached and remains in a contentious claim for his role as deputy governor via a judicial ruling. Meanwhile, In Ondo State, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, moments away from a similar fate, ascended to the role of governor after his boss died from cancer complications.

As with both deputy governors, the politics of both states appear to have taken divergent paths. While Edo remained a relatively competitive race, owing to a clash between different ruling parties at federal and state level, as well as a perceived strong third-party bid, Ondo appears to have a different outlook. Through our assessment across different training sessions and focus group discussions in all three senatorial zones of the state, we found an overwhelming resignation suggesting that the incumbent governor, and nominee of the All Progressives Congress (APC), would likely be returned elected, owing to a combination of sympathy, voter apathy and opposition in-fighting.

Despite this sentiment, there was also acknowledgment that there are few opposition politicians better placed to take on the incumbent. His predecessor is amongst them. Agboola Ajayi, PDP's nominee, was the deputy governor during the first term of former Governor Rotimi Akeredolu and remains a well-known figure in the state. He was also a candidate in the last elections, finishing a distant third, but remains popular within many grassroots networks that he cultivated during his term in office and from a period he served as a state legislator. Agboola's chances appear to hinge on growing disillusionment and discontent with the ruling party, especially since Ondo overwhelmingly supported President Bola Tinubu during his 2023 bid.

However, the ability of APC to unite its different factions, especially after a contentious primary, might be key to ensuring a strong showing. As with most elections in Nigeria, factors including identity and zoning, insecurity, information disorder and growing impassivity among voters will play a major role in how the elections are conducted. Another major point to note is the relative anonymity of major political gladiators on both sides, besides Aiyedatiwa and Agboola. This is of course in relative comparison to Edo, where former Governor Adams Oshiomhole and outgoing Governor Godwin Obaseki were more associated with the race than the candidates of their different parties. In Ondo, both Aiyedatiwa and Agboola have been front and centre, but more so as the prominent faces of their parties and less so by their individual clout. This bucks the trend of strong individuals overshadowing party structures in previous elections and provides some possible clues for how the two establishment parties might fare when the generation of founding fathers departs the stage.



This paper seeks to unpack the question of Ondo’s political leaning and the important factors that will make or mar the election result. It will also proffer nuanced background analysis, especially in reviewing recent political clashes and the different considerations across the different geopolitical zones. Finally, while it does not shy from the overwhelming prediction that our team received from different discussions, it seeks to situate potential reasons in the wider context of Nigeria’s political landscape.

## Background to the Elections

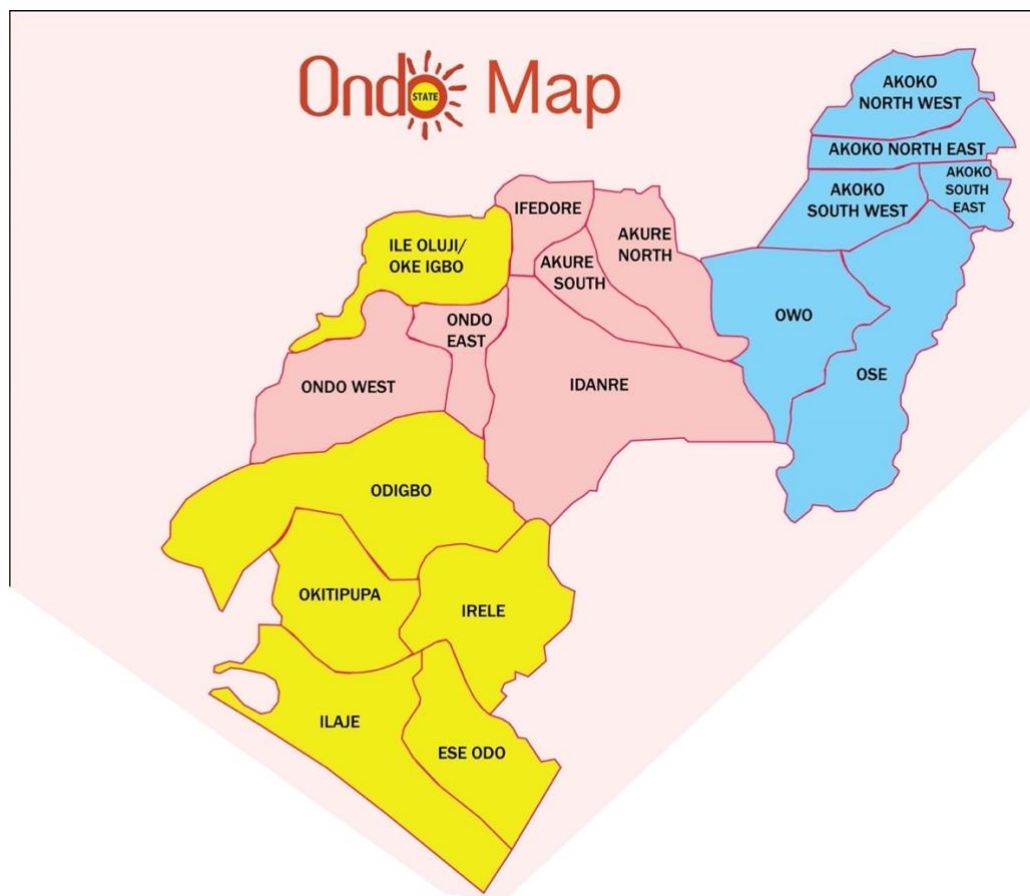


Fig 1 – Ondo State, with local governments and senatorial zones outlined (South – Yellow; Central – Orange and North – Blue)

### History of Ondo State

Ondo State, known as the “Sunshine State,” is situated in the heart of Nigeria’s tropics. It is rich in history, culture, and diversity, shaped by its unique blend of ethnic groups, towns, and autonomous establishments that were consolidated under British colonial administration for easier governance.

As of the most recent Nigerian national population census, in 2006, Ondo was ranked 18th of 36 states with an estimated population of 3,460,877<sup>1</sup>. In 2022, the state had an estimated population of 4,777,000. Ondo State is predominantly Yoruba-speaking, like most of the southwestern geopolitical

<sup>1</sup> Nigeria Data Portal, [State Population 2006](#).

zone. However, the state also has significant Ijaw-speaking communities, particularly in its southern senatorial district. These communities, primarily found in the Ilaje and Ese-Odo areas, have historically been integral to the state's cultural and political identity. One of Ondo's major economic assets is its oil-producing region, located in the southern part of the state. Oil exploration in this region dates back to 1908, when German companies first identified oil potential in the coastal community of the Ilaje Local Government Area. Since then, the district has become a key contributor to Nigeria's oil production.<sup>2</sup>

The state's creation has two notable phases in Nigeria's political history. The first was when Ondo was carved out of the old Western Region. This decision was made on 3 February 1976 by then Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed, just ten days before his assassination. The decree that officially established the state was subsequently signed by General Olusegun Obasanjo, his successor.<sup>3</sup> At its inception, Ondo State had nine local government areas (LGAs), which included areas that now form part of present-day Ekiti State: Western Ekiti, Northern Ekiti, Southern Ekiti, and Central Ekiti. Other LGAs included Akure, Okitipupa, Owo, Ondo, and Akoko, which still exist in the state today.

The second chapter in Ondo State's history, called the creation of the new Ondo State, unfolded on 1 October 1996, when the "Ekiti zone" was separated to form Ekiti State. This reorganisation saw Ondo State's original five LGAs expand to 18, following the division of Ekiti into an independent state with its own local governments.<sup>4</sup>

Ondo State has, over time, become a focal point for political tensions and electoral violence in Nigeria. One significant example was the 1983 gubernatorial election, which saw a fierce contest between the incumbent governor, Michael Ajasin, and his challenger, Akin Omoboriowo.<sup>5</sup> The election was marred by widespread violence and accusations of rigging, with Omoboriowo initially declared the winner in what many believed to be a manipulated result. The situation escalated into violent clashes between supporters of both candidates, leading to deaths and destruction of property before Ajasin was eventually reinstated as the rightful winner.

This episode of electoral violence played a major role in shaping the early narrative of Ondo State's political environment. However, subsequent elections would show stakeholders often working to prevent a recurrence of such unrest in elections. This has led to an atmosphere of keenly contested elections and a sense of pride that victories are earned from an enlightened and politically active electorate.

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<sup>2</sup> The Nation, [Oloibiri versus Araromi? Where was oil first discovered](#)

<sup>3</sup> Gazette Africa, [Government Gazette](#)

<sup>4</sup> CIRDDOC, [Ondo State](#)

<sup>5</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ajasin/Omoboriowo crisis: A watershed in Ondo political history](#)

### History of Ondo Elections in the Fourth Republic

Nigeria's Fourth Republic began in 1999, marking the return of democratic rule after years of military governance. In Ondo State, the governorship election of January 1999 was a key contest that set the stage for the political dynamics that followed.






1999 - 2003		AD	Adebayo Adefarati Ondo North
2003 - 2009		PDP	Olusegun Agagu Ondo South
2009 - 2017		LP	Olusegun Mimiko Ondo Central
2017 - 2023		APC	Rotimi Akeredolu Ondo North
2023 - date		APC	Lucky Aiyedatiwa Ondo South

Fig 2 – Former governors of Ondo State in the Fourth Republic

### 1999 Election: AD vs. PDP

The 1999 governorship race in Ondo State was primarily a contest between Adebayo Adefarati of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and Olusegun Agagu of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Adefarati, a former Commissioner for Works and Transport in Ondo's Second Republic, was a founding member of NADECO (National Democratic Coalition), a prominent pro-democracy group that resisted military rule in the 1990s. On the other hand, Agagu had served as deputy governor to Bamidele Olumilua during the brief civilian administration of 1992-1993 before the military retook power.

The AD, founded in response to the annulment of the 1993 presidential election widely believed to have been won by Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola, gained significant traction in southwestern Nigeria. The Yoruba political establishment rallied around the party, which emerged as a platform advocating for Yoruba interests and justice for the perceived wrongs of the annulled election. AD swept all governorship elections in the zone, including in Ondo, where Adefarati leveraged this sentiment to win the election, becoming the first governor of Ondo State in the Fourth Republic.

### 2003 Election: A Contested Outcome

Adefarati faced a strong wave of opposition ahead of his re-election bid. He was berated for failing to deliver on basic infrastructure, alienating political colleagues and disappointing voters who expected a strong performance off the back of his terms as commissioner in the Second Republic. At the same time, Olusegun Agagu – who became the Minister of Aviation (1999 – 2000) and then Power and

Steel (2000 – 2002) – was able to parlay his role into delivering some infrastructure projects that endeared him to many of his constituents.<sup>6</sup>

Ahead of the elections, many of Adefarati's former supporters, who had made a key difference in 1999, defected to PDP and supported his rival. One of such former allies was Olu Falae, the AD presidential nominee in 1999, who was no longer on speaking terms with Adefarati till the eve of the election. Finally, a rumoured pact between AD south west governors and President Obasanjo, where Obasanjo would get the votes of his zone and PDP would allow them serve a second term, proved to be wrong. PDP would end up seizing five of the six states in the region, including Ondo, with Agagu as governor.

### 2007 Election: Legal Battles and Electoral Calendar Shift

The 2007 governorship election was a defining moment in Ondo's electoral history. Agagu had earlier rewarded Mimiko for his influential support with the role of Secretary to the State Government (SSG). Obasanjo went further naming him as Federal Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development in 2005, which began enabling Mimiko to become a more popular and national face. According to some interviewees, Mimiko and Agagu partnered for the 2003 elections with the expectation that Agagu would serve one term and Mimiko would then contest. When it became clear that Mimiko would still seek the governorship, he was removed from cabinet and eventually had to leave PDP to contest under the Labour Party platform.

Mimiko's popularity and ability to galvanise opposition to the PDP, with a relatively unpopular governor and a national ticket headed by Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a northern governor that did not actively campaign himself, ensured he had a strong contest. However, the result was declared in favour of Agagu.

Mimiko contested the result, alleging widespread rigging and irregularities. In a landmark ruling in 2009, the Court of Appeal nullified Agagu's victory and declared Mimiko the rightful winner.<sup>7</sup> This judgement was significant not only because it changed the governorship midterm but also because it disrupted Ondo State's electoral calendar. Since then, the state's governorship elections have been held off-cycle, taking place a year after Nigeria's general elections.

Voter turnout for the 2007 election was moderate, but the court battle and eventual rerun heightened political tension and engagement in subsequent elections.

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<sup>6</sup> ThisDay (archives), [Ondo: The Drama to Watch](#)

<sup>7</sup> All Africa, [Ondo -Agagu out, Mimiko in](#)



### 2012 Election: Mimiko's Re-election and Akeredolu's Rise

In 2012, Olusegun Mimiko sought re-election under the Labour Party, with his main challenger being Rotimi Akeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). Mimiko won decisively, with a significant margin over Akeredolu. His re-election solidified his political influence in the state and the Labour Party's relevance in Ondo politics. Voter turnout in 2012 was relatively high, as the election was seen as a referendum on Mimiko's first term and his impact on the state's development. Although Akeredolu lost in 2012, his political trajectory continued to rise, setting the stage for future elections.

### 2016 Election: A Shift in Power

The 2016 governorship election in Ondo State saw a return of Rotimi Akeredolu, this time as the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which had emerged as a dominant political force in Nigeria. Akeredolu faced off against Eytayo Jegede of the PDP, who had served as the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in Ondo State under Mimiko's administration.

The election was closely contested, but Akeredolu ultimately emerged victorious, marking a significant power shift from the Labour Party to the APC. Voter turnout in 2016 was lower compared to previous elections, likely due to political fatigue and internal divisions within the PDP, which had suffered a leadership crisis leading up to the election.

### 2020 Election: Incumbency and Continuity

In the 2020 gubernatorial election, incumbent governor Rotimi Akeredolu sought re-election under the APC banner. His main opponents were Eytayo Jegede of the PDP, running for a second time, and Agboola Ajayi, Akeredolu's estranged deputy, who contested under the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). Akeredolu won re-election with a clear margin, largely benefiting from the power of incumbency and the relative fragmentation of opposition votes between Jegede and Ajayi.

This election reinforced the trend of incumbency being a significant factor in Ondo State politics, a feature that had become prominent after the electoral defeat of Adefarati and Agagu and the court-backed victory of Mimiko in 2007. Voter turnout in 2020 was lower than expected, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and general voter apathy in the state.

## **Recent Analysis of Ondo State Elections**

Elections in Ondo State were fairly contested at the onset of the Fourth Republic. Alliance for Democracy (AD) was able to display its influence in the South West, winning the presidential and governorship vote in 1999. Later, as part of a strategic push by then President Olusegun Obasanjo, PDP was able to gain the presidential and governorship in the 2003 elections. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party, who was later declared governor after an appeal in 2006, was able to gain a second term in 2010. During this period, PDP maintained a hold on the state by winning the presidential vote in 2011 through Goodluck Jonathan.

After the emergence of APC, ahead of the 2015 elections, the former Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) wing of the party was able to parlay national reach towards winning the vote for president in 2015 and governor in 2016. Conversely, Atiku Abubakar and PDP were able to win the presidential vote in 2019, before a return to APC with Bola Tinubu in 2023. During that time, Akeredolu was able to secure re-election in 2020.

As with most local government elections in Nigeria, the incumbent state party has been pretty insurmountable in Ondo state elections. The most recent elections, conducted in August 2020, saw a similar outcome with APC being declared winner in the 14 LGAs that had been declared, including running unopposed in five local government areas.<sup>8</sup>

During the 2023 general elections, APC was able to ensure a strong turnout for Tinubu in Ondo. This was expected, owing to the strong sense of pride and support that the South West showed to a Tinubu candidacy. Tinubu's 64.9 vote percentage in Ondo was second only to his vote share in Ekiti (65.4%), but it was the state with the largest margin between Tinubu and the runner-up, in this case Atiku, with a 44.6% vote margin. As expected, this also shows the strength and appeal of Ondo State for APC's re-election prospects ahead of 2027.

		Akeredolu		Jegede		
		votes	percentage	votes	percentage	
CENTRAL	Ifedore	9,350	44%	11,852	56%	21,202
CENTRAL	Ondo East	6,485	61.60%	4,049	38.40%	10,534
CENTRAL	Akure North	9,546	43.80%	12,263	56.20%	21,809
CENTRAL	Idanre	11,286	60.10%	7,499	39.90%	18,785
CENTRAL	Akure South	17,277	26.60%	47,627	73.40%	64,904
CENTRAL	Ondo West	15,977	60.10%	10,627	39.90%	26,604
		<b>69,921</b>		<b>93,917</b>		<b>163,838</b>
NORTH	Akoko North-East	16,572	66.40%	8,380	33.60%	24,952
NORTH	Akoko South-East	21,232	58.50%	15,055	41.50%	36,287
NORTH	Akoko North-West	15,809	60.50%	10,320	39.50%	26,129
NORTH	Owo	35,957	87.10%	5,311	12.90%	41,268
NORTH	Akoko South-East	9,419	70.20%	4,003	29.80%	13,422
NORTH	Ose	15,122	64.20%	8,421	35.80%	23,543
		<b>114,111</b>		<b>51,490</b>		<b>165,601</b>
SOUTH	Ile Oluji/Okeigbo	13,278	59%	9,231	41%	22,509
SOUTH	Irele	12,643	69.70%	5,493	30.30%	18,136
SOUTH	Okitipupa	19,266	65%	10,367	35%	29,633
SOUTH	Odigbo	23,571	71.30%	9,485	28.70%	33,056
SOUTH	Ilaje	26,657	70.50%	11,128	29.50%	37,785
SOUTH	Ese Odo	13,383	74.10%	4,680	25.90%	18,063
		<b>108,798</b>		<b>50,384</b>		<b>159,182</b>

Fig 3 – Results of the 2020 Ondo State Governorship Election, showing APC and PDP results.

<sup>8</sup> Business Day, [Ondo LG poll: APC wins 14 councils as state electoral commission awaits results from 4](#)

### *Ondo 2020 governorship election*

In 2020, Akeredolu and APC were able to secure the election victories in 15 of the 18 local government areas. The party swept Ondo North and South, the latter of which was expected to be difficult owing to the presence of Agboola on the ballot. Ondo Central was contested, with an even split in terms of the numbers of LGAs won by the two major parties. This is likely due to Jegede's influence and relative strength.

APC will need to turnout the same numbers Akeredolu recorded in the north to cement victory. The highest performing LGAs were mostly in the North (Akoko North West, 46.9%), Akoko South East, 45.2%, Akoko South West, 43.6% etc). None of the frontrunner governorship nominees hail from the more reliable vote banks of Irele (45.3% in 2020) and Okitipupa (43.8% in 2020), which leaves the worry over potential violence to ensure support for a different candidate.

Our previous election briefing papers have extensively looked at the breakdown in preceding elections in the state. The Edo 2024 governorship election paper in particular highlighted the different voting results, with APC winning the national legislature results, PDP carrying the last governorship and state house of assembly polls and LP winning the presidential vote.<sup>9</sup> However, the strength of APC in Ondo has rendered such analysis moot and particularly unhelpful in unpacking the likely outcome of this race. An argument that we have highlighted and will expand on further in the paper is the importance of looking at recent voter turnout.

There has been a correlation in voter turnout between presidential and governorship elections. In 2012, the governorship election turnout was 38.1%, a number that marginally rose to 38.8% in the 2015 presidential election, before dropping to 35.2% during the 2016 governorship election. The results during Buhari's re-election as president in 2019 saw a 32.2% voter turnout, which marginally increased to 32.7% during Akeredolu's re-election in 2020.<sup>10</sup> Going by the 29.6% turnout during the 2023 presidential election, we might see the first sub-30% turnout in Ondo governorship election history.

Even with its low 2023 turnout, Ondo was the state with the 12<sup>th</sup> highest turnout in 2023. But if the correlation between both presidential and governorship elections holds in Ondo, it might buck the trend of off-cycle governorship candidates outperforming recent presidential elections. In 2023, all three states saw higher scores in governorship elections – Bayelsa recorded 27.4% vs 16.4% during the elections, with Imo also recording a 29.4% turnout versus 19.8% in 2023. Kogi's margin was even starker, with 41% of citizens voting for governor versus 24.6% in the presidential election.

However, recent socioeconomic concerns and poor candidate and party momentum has contributed to increased voter apathy. Edo's 2024 governorship election recorded a 24.5% voter turnout, which was

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<sup>9</sup> CDD West Africa, [A Bellwether Election – Assessing Prospects and Trends ahead of the 2024 Edo governorship election](#)

<sup>10</sup> CDD West Africa, [Post Election Analysis: 2020 Ondo State Off-Cycle Governorship Election](#)

a half percentage point on the 24% recorded in 2023. Ondo falling below, in line with its own track record might be another side of growing citizen disillusionment with democratic processes.

Historically, citizens have been more invested and interested in state-level elections. Yet, our focus group discussions left us with the prevailing concern that this will get bucked because of the perception of a pre-determined outcome.

## **Election Context**

The formal commencement of the election process started on 26 September 2023, when INEC formally announced the dates for the off-cycle governorship elections for 2024.<sup>11</sup> It scheduled party primaries to hold in April 2024 and the commencement of campaigns to begin in June 2024. But, as with all elections, the actual process and context for this election can be found several cycles back. To understand the background for the 2024 elections, it is necessary to review the shared history of the two top candidates as former deputy governors to the two most recently elected governors of the state.

### *Akeredolu-Agboola rift*

Rotimi Akeredolu was a popular lawyer, former state attorney-general (1997 – 1999) and former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (2008 – 2010) when he first sought to run for governor during the 2012 elections. Ironically, he had served as part of the legal team that helped Mimiko win his appeal challenging the 2003 election outcome. Akeredolu lost to then incumbent Olusegun Mimiko, who won re-election for a final term, but prepared for the 27 November 2016 elections. He emerged as the nominee of the All Progressives Congress, fresh of a successful 2015 general election. Akeredolu's victory was a combination of the party's strong presence in the South West geopolitical zone, but also down to the split of the opposition. Mimiko, who would move to the PDP, was supporting Eytayo Jegede, while the nominee of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) was Olusola Oke, a strong candidate from Ondo South.

Akeredolu's running mate, Agboola Ajayi, was also a strong factor, owing to his experience as a local government chair in Ese Odo (2003 – 2007) and then his election as a federal representative (2007 – 2011). According to participants in focus group discussions, Agboola's contemporaries from his term as a local government chair were especially key in helping manage the impression of Akeredolu being 'imposed' from afar, after a revelation that Akeredolu was originally registered to vote in Ibadan, Oyo State. Agboola's appeal also cut across party lines, owing to his past as a member of PDP before his defection ahead of the 2016 elections. As a result, having a running mate with established ties to the local political structure would prove key to winning a closely fought election.

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<sup>11</sup> Premium Times, [INEC announces dates for Edo, Ondo governorship elections](#)

However, the two fell out during the first term. Reasons put forward by focus group discussion participants ranged from the influence of the state's first lady to clashes over political appointees in Ondo South, where Agboola hails from. Other sources pointed to several allocations being given to PDP allies of the deputy governor, including dissuading a youth leader from defecting to APC. There was another rumour of the deputy governor seeking to be named acting governor during the period that Akeredolu flew to Germany for surgery.<sup>12</sup>

Supporters and sympathisers of Agboola, from a minority Ijaw ethnic group, claimed that more prominent groups within Ondo South tried to drive a wedge between the governor and his deputy in order to weaken Agboola's influence ahead of a prospective bid for the top job. There were also reports that, wary of a planned attempt by key party loyalists to defeat him at the 2020 primary, Akeredolu further withdrew to a trusted circle that primarily included those from Ondo North and did not include his deputy. Finally, during a campaign rally, Agboola criticised the governor for mismanaging the oil revenue of the state and also alluded to the strong influence of Akeredolu's wife, stating that she picked Aiyedatiwa as the new running mate.<sup>13</sup>

According to most accounts, the final straw that prompted Agboola to defect from APC to PDP was when the state commissioner of police, Bolaji Salami, tried to prevent the deputy governor from leaving government house in an official vehicle.<sup>14</sup> Salami would later claim that he did this, having caught wind of Agboola's attempt to defect, and his belief that this should 'render him unqualified for some official benefits. This led to a protracted period where Akeredolu sacked the deputy governors' aides<sup>15</sup> and, in July 2020, the State House of Assembly began impeachment proceedings against Agboola after his defection.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these actions, Agboola refused entreaties from the governor and APC chieftains to resign the deputy governorship, insisting that the mandate he received from voters in 2016 was still valid.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, despite seeking PDP's ticket, the main opposition would end up renominating Eytayo Jegede, leaving Agboola to move to Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) to actualise his ambition. Agboola would finish a distant third in the election and leave office at the expiration of his term.

### *Akeredolu-Aiyedatiwa fallout*

In July 2020, during the peak of the conflict between Akeredolu and Agboola, the governor nominated Lucky Aiyedatiwa as his running mate. At the time, Aiyedatiwa was a former federal lawmaker and member of the board of the Niger Delta Development Commission, a regional development body focusing on oil extracting states. His emergence from a shortlist that reportedly also included a former senatorial aspirant and the secretary to the state government prioritised the

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<sup>12</sup> The Nation, [Ondo: Inside story of Akeredolu, deputy's feud](#)

<sup>13</sup> Vanguard, [Ondo 2020: Why I fell out with Akeredolu — Deputy Gov. Ajayi](#)

<sup>14</sup> Premium Times, [UPDATED: Ondo deputy governor dumps APC for PDP](#)

<sup>15</sup> Premium Times, [Ondo 2020: Akeredolu sacks all his deputy's aides](#)

<sup>16</sup> The Nation, [APC lashes Ondo deputy governor as House begins impeachment](#)

<sup>17</sup> Daily Trust, [I won't resign as Ondo deputy governor — Ajayi](#)



need to pick a replacement from Ondo South, to ensure that the zone did not feel short-changed by Agboola being dropped.<sup>18</sup> Aiyedatiwa also stood out as a long-term member of the party, as opposed to having defected like Agboola, and because of his relative political inexperience, which meant Akeredolu would still have wielded tremendous influence over the state – including the choice of his successor.

APC's ticket would emerge triumphant, defeating both Agboola and Jegede. However, in time, the bond between both men would become frayed and eventually leave a situation where some could credibly question if Akeredolu would have supported an Aiyedatiwa bid if he was alive. A prominent news item was that a female aide to Akeredolu's wife was sharing confidential information about the governor's health with the deputy governor.<sup>19</sup>

In 2023, in a similar move to one carried out with Agboola, Akeredolu disbanded Aiyedatiwa's media team and dismissed them from government.<sup>20</sup> The deputy governor still maintained his loyalty with his boss, but the governor's reticence to hand over power to his deputy in September 2023, during a three-month medical vacation, was seen as sign that perhaps Akeredolu had cooled on his deputy.<sup>21</sup> This also encouraged a strong coterie of state commissioners, government functionaries and federal lawmakers who became interested, and declared intentions, in seeking the ticket of the party.

Perhaps in a bid to whittle his influence in a forthcoming primary, the State House of Assembly served impeachment hearings against Aiyedatiwa in September 2023<sup>22</sup> and, after a judicial ruling sought to stay the proceedings, they resumed again in October 2023.<sup>23</sup> As the governor's medical condition was rumoured to worsen, and as state officials continued jostling for prominence and seeking to unseat the deputy governor, President Bola Tinubu waded into the matter and summoned the parties involved to Abuja in November.<sup>24</sup> Despite the president's intervention, the matter still appeared unresolved, especially as the state assembly refused to acknowledge the Aiyedatiwa as acting governor pending Akeredolu's return. Tinubu summoned participants again for another meeting in early December, in a bid to avoid a divided house ahead of the forthcoming primaries.<sup>25</sup>

The meeting achieved a stay of action, with the then acting governor now pledging not to change any cabinet members or making any change to personnel pending the return of the governor. This would keep the peace till 27 December, when Akeredolu succumbed to cancer and died in office and Aiyedatiwa was sworn in as the substantive governor of the state.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Vanguard, [\[ICYMI\] Ondo 2020: Akeredolu picks Lucky Ayedatiwa as running mate](#)

<sup>19</sup> Vanguard, [What led to feud between late Akeredolu, Aiyedatiwa – Ex-aide](#)

<sup>20</sup> ThisDay, [Brewing Cold War Between Akeredolu and Aiyedatiwa in Ondo](#)

<sup>21</sup> Daily Trust, [Things fall apart as Gov Akeredolu, deputy battle over succession](#)

<sup>22</sup> Premium Times, [Ondo Assembly serves deputy governor impeachment notice](#)

<sup>23</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo Assembly resumes Aiyedatiwa's impeachment process, demands CJ's panel](#)

<sup>24</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo crisis: Tinubu meets Ayedatiwa, gov's aides today](#)

<sup>25</sup> Daily Trust, [Again, Tinubu summons Akeredolu's deputy, assembly speaker](#)

<sup>26</sup> Premium Times, [UPDATED: Governor Rotimi Akeredolu is dead](#)

### Major party primaries

#### All Progressives Congress (APC)

For many analysts and potential nominees, the APC race ended when Aiyedatiwa became the incumbent governor. What was previously an open contest, owing to a term-limited governor who had not openly endorsed any candidate, soon became a walkover because of a new incumbent. Despite that, some sought to appeal to Ondo Southern senatorial district delegates by reminding them that, following a law forbidding individuals from taking an oath of office twice, Aiyedatiwa would only be eligible to serve one term. This propped up some candidates from Ondo South, such as Olusola Oke, but some politicians from other zones supported the governor ahead of a hopeful favour during the 2028 governorship elections.

Aiyedatiwa was declared the winner with 48,569 votes, defeating Mayowa Akinfolarin who polled 15,343 votes and Olusola Oke who had 14,865 votes. The primaries were marred by violence, notably in Ifedore, where votes were not recorded.<sup>27</sup> The protracted nature of the contest led to speculation that some prominent politicians would leave the party ahead of the elections and there were strong entreaties made to dissuade such activities from taking place. The most notable opposition came from Senator Jimoh Ibrahim (APC-Ondo South) whose case was eventually withdrawn.<sup>28</sup> Olusola Oke, another major stalwart who felt aggrieved by the process, stated that his respect for the party and Aiyedatiwa being from the same Ilaje Local Government Area, were why he had resolved to support the governor in the contest.<sup>29</sup> Respondents during our engagements were quick to praise the party's structure and machinery for ensuring a united party ahead of the elections.

#### People's Democratic Party (PDP)

Both parties followed the expected convention that the next governor would come from Ondo South. This ruled out Eyitayo Jegede, from Ondo North, who had been the party's nominee in 2016 and 2020. Agboola's campaign leaned into his position as a prominent Ondo South politician and cited that while Aiyedatiwa would only be able to serve four more years, he could realistically serve eight years if he won two terms.

Agboola, who came second in the 2020 primaries, was widely expected to become the nominee but he still faced a strong field. He polled 264 votes, ahead of former representative Kolade Akinjo, with 157 votes, and former secretary-general of *Afenifere*, a prominent Yoruba socio-cultural group, Sola Ebiseni who polled 99 votes.<sup>30</sup>

PDP's primaries were still contentious, with Ebiseni defecting to Labour Party to pick up the ticket after the original nominee was cited as a placeholder candidate.<sup>31</sup> Ebiseni's departure shows an

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<sup>27</sup> Vanguard, [Aiyedatiwa declared winner of Ondo APC primary](#)

<sup>28</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Court dismisses Jimoh Ibrahim's case against Aiyedatiwa](#)

<sup>29</sup> PM News, [Ondo 2024: Why I will support Aiyedatiwa despite my grievances – Olusola Oke](#)

<sup>30</sup> Vanguard, [Former Deputy Gov. Ajayi Agboola wins Ondo PDP primary](#)

<sup>31</sup> The Nation, [PDP governorship aspirant Ebiseni dumps party](#)

already fractured opposition further dividing ahead of a difficult race. Furthermore, aides and allies of former Governor Olusegun Mimiko also defected to APC in August to support the governor's re-election bid.<sup>32</sup> Mimiko himself, the only living elected former governor, has yet to make any clear moves. He is expected to tacitly support Aiyedatiwa but would not openly get involved in the race because of his brother's own candidacy on the platform of ZLP.<sup>33</sup>

## Themes

As with every election, there are several major themes that are expected to play a major role in the outcome of the elections. We have identified the following as key in the Ondo election: individuals and infighting, incumbency, intra-party structures and coordination; identity and zoning; individuals and infighting; intra-party dynamics; incumbency; impassivity and voter disillusionment; insecurity; information disorder and institutions.

### *Individuals and Infighting*

Unlike most incumbent governors seeking re-election, Aiyedatiwa has been able to benefit from a relative short term in office. While voters will review his performance over 11 months in office, his travails prior to assuming power were still very fresh in the minds of those we spoke to concerning the elections.

Respondents were keen to stress that Aiyedatiwa's emergence as governor must have been 'divinely orchestrated' because of how out of favour he had been with the former governor's camp. In particular, in Okitipupa, participants in our discussions mentioned his clash with the former first lady who appeared to wield influence during her husband's period in office. As cited earlier, there was also widespread condemnation for the manner with which the governor's team went about trying to impeach him from office. Again, the fact that the process was still in play when he suddenly became governor was another nod to the impression that his success was down to 'fate'. For many, this was especially key because Aiyedatiwa would not have been expected to win APC's ticket if he was not already the incumbent and this helped in his ability to outmanoeuvre more popular and influential politicians in the party.

For many, the past year has been widely excused owing to the nature of his assumption of office and the close proximity to the elections. This has excused widespread frustration and, in some cases, outright condemnation of Akeredolu's performance during his second term as governor. Participants in Owo, Ondo North, were critical of the governor from their part of the state, and believed that his illness might have precluded his ability to devote enough attention to his performance. Conversely, participants in Akure, Ondo Central, rated the governor high in security matters, based off his key role in the creation of the regional vigilante *Amotekun* corps. However, they stated that his work in

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<sup>32</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo 2024: Mimiko's aides, associates defect to APC](#)

<sup>33</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo 2024: Mimiko's brother emerges ZLP candidate](#)

healthcare, education and infrastructure was quite low and expressed surprise that participants in the northern district were critical because of his investment in a dual carriageway road in that zone that was expanded during his term in office.

Many complaints around the former administration have therefore insulated Aiyedatiwa's starring role because of the eventual breakdown in his relationship with the governor. As a result, despite serving as the incumbent, he has been successful in not being tied with the recent state of affairs, a consideration that has not been extended to another political office holder.

### *Incumbency at the Federal Level*

In the lead-up to the 16 November 2024 governorship election in Ondo State, specific incidents have raised concerns about the potential misuse of incumbency at the state and federal levels. At the state level, the issues raised include the restriction of access to venues and intimidation of opposition by state security forces. First, PDP has accused the Aiyedatiwa administration of denying them access to Democracy Park in Akure, where they planned to kick off their campaign on 15 October 2024.<sup>34</sup> Second, Agboola has pointed out signals indicating plans for harassment against his party members by security forces aligned with the APC.<sup>35</sup>

There are also fears of using incumbency at the federal level, a term now known as 'federal might'. This plays out when federal institutions are personalised to serve the ruling party's interest in an election. In Ondo, this has been reflected in the allegation of Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) Toyin Babalola being a member of the APC and a long resident of Ondo state, against the procedure where RECs are deployed to states other than theirs.<sup>36</sup> This trend was also observed in the Edo state where Dr. Anugbum Onuoha, the REC was accused of being a known supporter of the APC and cousin of Nyesom Wike, former Rivers State governor, PDP member and serving FCT minister in an APC government.<sup>37</sup>

However, harsh conditions and the concentration of power at the centre means that Ondo APC might soon have to deal with the impact and legacy of an increasingly unpopular federal government. Nigeria's economic situation has deteriorated significantly under President Bola Tinubu, resulting in widespread public discontent. This environment presents significant challenges for local politicians such as Aiyedatiwa, who may find their political fortunes linked to the increasingly unpopular federal administration. The public's growing dissatisfaction with Tinubu's policies may undermine local support for the APC, with voters likely to associate Aiyedatiwa with the economic hardships and controversies caused by Tinubu's administration.

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<sup>34</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo PDP, APC bicker over campaign venue](#)

<sup>35</sup> Business Day, [Ondo Guber: Ajayi's PDP candidate raises alarm over members' intimidation by APC](#)

<sup>36</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Ondo REC not an indigene, INEC replies Makinde](#)

<sup>37</sup> Nigerian Tribune, [Ondo guber: Again, PDP demands redeployment of REC](#)

As of September 2024, Nigeria's inflation rate has reached an alarming 32.70%,<sup>38</sup> marking a significant increase from the 22.41 percent recorded in March 2023.<sup>39</sup> This surge is largely attributed to the removal of fuel subsidies and the devaluation of the naira, which have collectively triggered a cost-of-living crisis. For instance, petrol prices have increased from around N145 per litre in 2023 to N1030 in October 2024.<sup>40</sup> Staple food prices, particularly rice, have more than doubled within a year. This dramatic rise in living costs have sparked numerous protests across the country with the latest most widespread one being the #EndHunger and #EndGovernance protest that began in August 2024 demanding a reversal of Tinubu's economic policies.<sup>41</sup>

Notably the president, whose victory in the state was decisive in the 2023 elections, has not actively taken part in any campaigns in the state. But while some focus group discussion participants cited a perceived detachment from the federal government, due to an expected victorious outcome, Ondo will feature very prominently in the president's plan for re-election. A defeat for APC in the state, or a less than commanding victory, might move the state to a 'toss-up' column if opposition parties field a nominee that can appeal to the state's citizens.

#### *Intra-party structures and coordination*

A major question in our focus group discussions and one that repeatedly came up in analyses was if Ondo now qualifies as a 'one-party state'. A counter that was often thrown up was the lack of effective coordination in the major opposition party and the opportunity it causes to allow the ruling party develop control.

Focus group participants raised the 2023 senate elections, which saw PDP defending two of the three Ondo senate seats and the opportunity to unseat the sole APC incumbent who was retiring. Despite this, APC candidates were able to leverage on the popularity boost from their nomination of a fellow South-Westerner ahead of successful campaigns. For some, this came because the fairly well-known PDP incumbents lost renomination bids and the result was a fractured party and approach towards campaigning. Some went as far back as citing the 2016 election, which saw a spirited third party bid put a dent in the PDP stronghold and lead to APC's win.

Many pointed to the fact that APC was able to rely on extensive connections with the ruling party at the centre. Focus group participants were also very clear about the role that existing legislators have played in 'marshalling troops' and ensuring compliance to their political direction in their areas. In Owo, several participants cited the influence and philanthropy of the Federal Interior Minister, a former national representative, whose ability to maintain a strong connection with his constituents meant he was likely to remain a key player in the area's politics.

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<sup>38</sup> Punch Newspaper, [High petrol price pushes inflation to 32.70% – Report](#)

<sup>39</sup> Business Day, [Nigeria's inflation rate nine months after new government since 1999](#)

<sup>40</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Naira drops further as NNPC hikes fuel prices again](#)

<sup>41</sup> The Cable, [Fuelling the flames: Unpacking the #EndHunger protests in Nigeria](#)



The idea of structure, through party control of other key positions, was very telling about how effective these political office holders appear to be in shoring up support for their parties. For example, they mentioned that part of Mimiko's influence as governor came from ensuring three LP senators were elected in 2011, ahead of a successful second term bid in 2012. These senators reportedly caucused with the PDP, which could explain PDP's victory in the state during the presidential election. Similar trends followed in subsequent elections – in 2015, APC won the state and returned two of the three senators; in 2019, PDP won the state and returned two of the three senators; before APC regained the state and won all three senate seats and eight of the nine federal representative seats.

When the influence of state governors on local government elections is added, it provides more context for the seeming idea that structures are important. However, an interesting comparison with Edo arises when reviewing the strength and dominance of party in this context. Ondo APC is largely acknowledged to be very strong and the nominee of the party was likely to start the campaign as the frontrunner. Yet Akeredolu was not an uncontested godfather and, while his endorsement would have been key, APC would still have seen keenly contested party primaries. Similarly, while Jegede was largely expected to run, he is reported to have withdrawn his interest once the party confirmed that it would zone the governorship to the southern senatorial zone.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the perception is that the party is strong in Ondo and that this deference to the wider party ideals and influence is likely what has been conflated as structure. And, it would appear owing to recent results, APC has been more effective and parlayed recent appointments and elections to bolster their control of the state.

The outlier result, with Atiku defeating Buhari in the 2023 presidential vote in the state, was largely attributed to Akeredolu's cooling of support to Buhari. According to the participants, Akeredolu was more critical of Buhari during the latter's second term – primarily around issues of insecurity<sup>43</sup>, the open grazing ban,<sup>44</sup> the creation of the Amotekun security corps<sup>45</sup> and, ahead of the 2023 elections, the naira redesign policy.<sup>46</sup> For some participants, Ondo's loyalty to APC in 2023, despite prevailing economic challenges, was down to Tinubu's nomination and a sense of duty to supporting a Yoruba candidate.

As a result of these points, while the ruling APC appears to be strong, this loyalty is not entrenched enough to call this a permanent stronghold. If an opposition party is able to carry out considerable work, and possibly appeal to the identity politics of the state, a future changing of the guard is not impossible.

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<sup>42</sup> Premium Times, [Ondo 2024: PDP zones governorship to south](#)

<sup>43</sup> Premium Times, [Seven APC governors, others fault Buhari's handling of security, restructuring](#)

<sup>44</sup> The Nation, [Let Buhari tell Nigerians he does not support criminality, says Akeredolu](#)

<sup>45</sup> Premium Times, [Automatic Weapons: Akeredolu replies Presidency, says Amotekun can't fight armed criminals 'with bare hands'](#)

<sup>46</sup> Punch Newspaper, [Naira redesign, a failure, reverse policy, Akeredolu tells Buhari](#)

### *Identity and Zoning*

Although zoning is not explicitly stated in many political party guidelines, it remains a fundamental aspect of candidacy determination and political strategy in Nigerian elections. Zoning ensures that power is rotated among different regions, fostering a sense of inclusion and equity. This practice, while informal, plays a significant role in elections, with political parties often selecting candidates based on the senatorial zone of the incumbent.

The significance of zoning was especially highlighted during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, with all frontline candidates seeking the presidency on the basis of fairness to their zone. Atiku Abubakar, at the Arewa House dialogues, famously stated that the north needed a northern president and has mentioned the fact that the North East has not produced a head of state or government since Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's sole prime minister (1960 – 66). Support for Peter Obi's candidacy in some corners was predicated on the fact that since the brief regime of General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi (January – July 1966), a south-easterner has not led the government at the centre. Perhaps most famously, Bola Tinubu claimed that it was the turn of the Yoruba and that, within his ethnic group, it was his turn. The '*e mi lokan*' [It's my turn in Yoruba] statement became a rallying cry and enshrined the zone's approach to power. This sense of regional entitlement to power has become a recurring theme in Nigerian politics and it has become a similar trait at sub-national level.

The role of zoning is not unique to Ondo but is seen across Nigerian states. For instance, in Edo State, the 2024 gubernatorial election prominently featured discussions about zoning. There was a strong push to address the historical imbalance of power, particularly in Edo Central, which had been marginalised in previous cycles.

### *Zoning in Ondo: The 2024 Election*

In Ondo State, zoning has traditionally dictated which senatorial district produces the governor. Since the return to democracy in 1999, the governorship has rotated among the three senatorial zones. The cycle began with Adebayo Adefarati from Ondo North (1999–2003), followed by Olusegun Agagu from Ondo South (2003–2009), then Olusegun Mimiko from Ondo Central (2009–2017). Rotimi Akeredolu from Ondo North resumed leadership in 2017, and his re-election in 2020 maintained the zoning pattern (See figure 2 above).

Previous governors were not successful in staying in office. When Mimiko became the first two-term Ondo governor in the Fourth Republic, this set precedent that Akeredolu supporters referenced when he sought a second term. Agboola Ajayi, who also contested in 2020, faced limited support<sup>47</sup> from his own kinsmen<sup>48</sup>, which may have been due to this informal agreement. This understanding of power rotation was further evidenced by Akeredolu's selection of his deputies, who were always from the southern senatorial district, assumed to be next in line to assume the governorship.

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<sup>47</sup>Vanguard [ONDO 2020: Ijaws in Ondo disown Ajayi, apologise to Akeredolu](#)

<sup>48</sup>The Nation, [Ondo: Inside story of Akeredolu, deputy's feud](#)

The unforeseen death of Akeredolu in 2023 disrupted the zoning sequence. His deputy, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, will complete the remainder of the term. However, due to constitutional limits precluding individuals from taking an oath of office more than twice, he won't be able to seek a second full term in office. This fact was front and centre as discussants raised the fact that the southern senatorial zone would be short-changed and receive less time in power. Similarly, for some in the north, there was some concern that the year out of power won't be accommodated in any cycle till power returns after the central zone is expected to take power after the next governor.

Zoning in Ondo State also intersects with ethnic identities, particularly in the South senatorial district. The district is home to both the Ijaw and Ilaje ethnic groups, who have historically been in conflict over land and resources.<sup>49</sup> The Ijaws, especially the Arogbo and Apoi-Ijaw subgroups, have often felt marginalised in the state's politics. The rise of Agboola Ajayi, an Ijaw politician, in the 2020 election further deepened these tensions, as some feared that his ascendancy might weaken the influence of the Ilajes, who have traditionally held more power in the district.

Historically, zoning has also been the vehicle under which development is driven within the senatorial districts. For example, Adekunle Ajasin University was established in Akungba Akoko, when Adebayo Adefarati was governor of the state in the northern zone. Agagu similarly drove the development of the Igbokoda seaport, in the southern zone, but was unable to finalise it before being removed in court. Likewise, Olusegun Mimiko drove the Ondo School of Medical Sciences located in the central senatorial zone.

#### *Gender Representation as an Identity Issue in Ondo State Elections.*

Gender representation has long been a critical, yet under-addressed, identity issue in Nigerian politics, and Ondo State is no exception. Despite the growing global push for gender inclusivity in governance, Ondo has consistently failed to reflect this in its political leadership. While other south west states have notably sought to accommodate this imbalance through the appointment of women as deputy governors, Ondo is one of only two states (alongside Oyo) in the zone that has never had a female deputy governor let alone a female governor since the return to democracy in 1999.<sup>50</sup>

Over the last two decades, women have been significantly under-represented in Ondo's political offices. Between 1999 and 2019, women held just 5% of the seats in the State House of Assembly, while men controlled 95%.<sup>51</sup> This imbalance is even more evident when considering the major parties' governorship candidates. For instance, in the run-up to the 2024 election, out of the 16 aspirants in the APC primary, only two were women.<sup>52</sup> The PDP, which fielded seven aspirants, did not have a single female candidate.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The New Humanitarian, [Panel seeks end to ethnic Ijaw, Ilaje clashes](#)

<sup>50</sup> CDD Fact Check, [Gendered Disinformation shaping women's participation in Edo and Ondo polls](#)

<sup>51</sup> International Journal of Contemporary Applied Research, [Women's Political Participation in Ondo State](#)

<sup>52</sup> Channels TV, [APC Holds Ondo Primary Election, Aiyedatiwa, 15 Others Vie For Ticket](#)

<sup>53</sup> Daily Trust, [Ondo gov'ship: 7 PDP aspirants jostle for party's ticket today](#)

Despite this, women have often been the gender with more registered voters – a trend expected to continue in the 2024 elections. This trend is not limited to Ondo and might be the key to achieving improved gender representation in elective office.

### *Impassivity and Expected Voter Apathy and Disillusionment*

Despite these shortcomings, the opposition parties have struggled to mount a robust challenge against the APC. The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and other contenders have been struggling against the entrenched structures of the APC in Ondo State. The absence of a strong opposition could lead many voters to default back to the familiar choice of the ruling party or not vote at all. Even if citizens are not satisfied with the APC-led state and federal governments, the lingering concern is that the opposition appears unable to wrestle power from an APC that controls all three senatorial seats, eight out of nine House of Representative seats and has been able to control internal differences arising from the political party primaries. These political structures would require a deeply united front to beat.

The PDP, arguably the strongest opposition in the state, is approaching the election with a divided house both at the state and national levels. This is reflected for example in the fact that only a small number of party agents have registered for monitoring duties during the election, which raises concerns about the seriousness of the opposition parties.<sup>54</sup>

### *Insecurity*

A security analysis of the Ondo elections reveals the existence of threat levels that cannot be ignored. The state has its own share of violent non-state actors, such as cult groups, political thugs, and criminal syndicates involved in kidnapping and armed robbery. In rural areas, the prospect for farmer-herder conflict is also a significant concern. When this challenge spills over into electoral periods, politicians allegedly arm the actors to intimidate opponents and suppress voter turnout in opposition strongholds. This is especially worrisome because local communities are forming militias with the aim of protecting themselves against invaders, but there is also the considerable risk of these groups serving the interest of politicians.

In 2020, there were incidents in the lead up to and during the elections. CDD-West Africa’s own reports recorded 34 incidents of election-related violence between August and October 2020, with 12 taking place during campaign rallies.<sup>55</sup> While there have not been many recorded incidents before the 2024 election, it remains imperative that security forces remain diligent in ensuring that the situation is not aggravated.

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<sup>54</sup> Punch Newspaper, [24,148 party agents register for Ondo governorship election – INEC](#)

<sup>55</sup> Punch Newspaper, [34 pre-election violence cases recorded in Ondo, says CDD](#)

The general security atmosphere leading to the election in Ondo has been relatively peaceful, and that is attributed to the uncompetitive nature of the elections. Nevertheless, historical data on the general security trends and times of election cannot be ignored. Although not as intense in this election, rivalry among political factions, cult clashes and ethnic contestations are present. The ready involvement of political thugs and gangs such as the notorious Ade Basket Boys in Akure complicates the problem. Respondents in the pre-assessment visit expressed fears of violence in Akure South, Owo, Idanre and Akoko South East.

### *Information Disorder*

In modern politics, information wins elections, and disorder within the information ecosystem—whether through disinformation, misinformation, or mal-information—presents a growing challenge. This manipulation of information to confuse voters or discredit opponents has been increasingly utilised by political actors. The Ondo 2024 election mirrors the national trend, with various forms of information disorder already shaping public perceptions and the political landscape.

Disinformation was a prominent feature in the Edo election when candidates were rumoured to have stepped down just a few hours before the elections and it remains central in Ondo as well. In the case of Ondo, candidates have weaponised information against each other, targeting not just their opponents but also key institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These attacks often exploit existing biases, fuelling division and distrust among the electorate.

A notable instance involved Jimoh Ibrahim, a disgruntled aspirant who lost to Lucky Aiyedatiwa in the APC primary. A false video emerged allegedly showing him instructing thugs to commit violent acts.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, a video circulated claiming that APC rallies had been attacked by angry youths<sup>57</sup>, creating a false narrative months before official campaign activities had even begun. This disinformation sought to question the legitimacy and strength of the ruling party's candidate.

Lucky Aiyedatiwa himself was also a target of malicious propaganda. A video surfaced purportedly showing him involved in a physical altercation with a woman rumoured to be his mistress.<sup>58</sup> After thorough examination, the footage was not of him. This narrative was designed to stoke the existing controversy surrounding earlier accusations of domestic violence<sup>59</sup>, aiming to further tarnish his personal image and credibility.

INEC, as the electoral authority, was not spared from information disorder. Rumours spread that the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) assigned to Ondo was an indigene of the state, which was framed as a violation of the constitutional requirement for REC appointments. While it was later

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<sup>56</sup> CDD Fact Check, [Did Jimoh Ibrahim instruct thugs to kill?](#)

<sup>57</sup> CDD Fact Check, [Angry Youths Disrupting APC Campaign?](#)

<sup>58</sup> CDD Fact Check, [Does video show ondo governor fighting with mistress in London?](#)

<sup>59</sup> Punch Newspaper, [I never assaulted my wife](#)



clarified that this was merely an INEC policy, not a constitutional mandate, the false information had already sowed doubts about the neutrality of the commission.

### *Institutions*

#### *The Influence of Traditional Rulers*

Similar to the Edo elections, where a candidate's involvement with the paramount ruler of the Benin Kingdom stirred controversy and potentially impacted their political fortunes, the upcoming Ondo 2024 off-cycle election could witness similar dynamics. In Edo, the traditional ruler's position was thought to influence the outcome, raising questions about the intersection of cultural authority and political legitimacy. This is a theme that might also emerge in Ondo, but with a key difference: the nature of traditional authority in Ondo State is more decentralised and regionally defined.

In Ondo, the power of traditional rulers is more evenly distributed across the three senatorial districts and within the local government areas. Each district has its own paramount ruler, all of whom command significant respect and authority. Unlike Edo, where the Oba of Benin holds a central position of influence, Ondo's traditional leadership is spread across several powerful figures who are recognised within their respective territories as custodians of culture and governance. The political influence of these traditional leaders remains substantial, and any candidate running for office must be mindful of their relationships with them.

For example, the central senatorial district is home to the Osemawe of Ondo, who plays a critical role in shaping public opinion within his domain. Meanwhile, the Deji of Akure, based in the state capital, wields influence not only in Akure but throughout the Northern Senatorial District. A part of the northern senatorial zone is similarly represented by the Olowo of Owo, whose voice carries significant weight within that region.

Together, these traditional rulers create a web of authority that candidates must carefully navigate, balancing their political strategies with the cultural expectations and allegiances of each ruler's constituency.

This egalitarian structure of traditional leadership ensures that no single ruler dominates the political parlance in Ondo, unlike states with a singular, highly influential monarch. Instead, candidates in Ondo must contend with a variety of influential voices<sup>60</sup>, each of whom has the power to shape the trajectory of the election. The decentralised nature of traditional authority in Ondo means that cultural and political allegiances are of varying influence across the regions.

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<sup>60</sup> Independent, [Ondo 2020: Ondo Deputy Gov. Arogbo-Ijaw Feud Deepens](#)

## Conclusion

Ondo State's slogan as the 'Sunshine State' is not without merit. At every juncture, and even during the occasional rain showers, the heat was strong and fairly comparable to states in the North mostly known for high temperatures. While Ondo has fully embraced its slogan, with a vibrant and hospital citizenry, the forthcoming election has failed to bring the vibrancy and excitement that a political jamboree is often associated with.

Ondo and Anambra, expected to go to the polls in November 2025, serve as the nearest things to a 'mid-point' assessment for any Nigerian president. An off-cycle election is always an opportunity for citizens to show their opinion of the direction that a country is moving. Unlike in Edo, in Ondo the state and federal government belong to the same party. Yet, while there might be considerable concern about the socio-economic situation in the country, other factors will play a much more major role in how citizens vote for the governor.

We have identified key factors that will make or mar the elections, including the individuals involved and the varying evaluations of incumbent governments at federal and state level. We have also reviewed party structures, expected voter apathy, insecurity, information disorder and the impact that the various institutions involved in the elections will have. Most of these factors are not different from any recent Nigerian election and have been recurring fixtures in Nigerian politics for a while. Yet, in the context of this election, they take on a different form which has the capacity to tilt the outcome in any direction.

A caveat in this analysis is the capacity of the election management body to deliver a free, fair and credible election. It is important that laid down processes are allowed to take place and that any concern or worry about the election is properly addressed by authorities. This will help ensure that the next administration will begin with as much legitimacy and belief as required to deliver on their mandate.

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## **About CDD**

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organisation. The Centre was established to mobilize global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to democratization and development processes in West Africa, and to provide alternatives and best practices to the sustenance of democracy and development in the region. CDD envisions a West Africa that is democratically governed, economically integrated – promoting human security and people-centred development. The mission of the Centre is to be the prime catalyst and facilitator for strategic analysis and capacity-building for sustainable democracy and development in the West African sub-region.

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